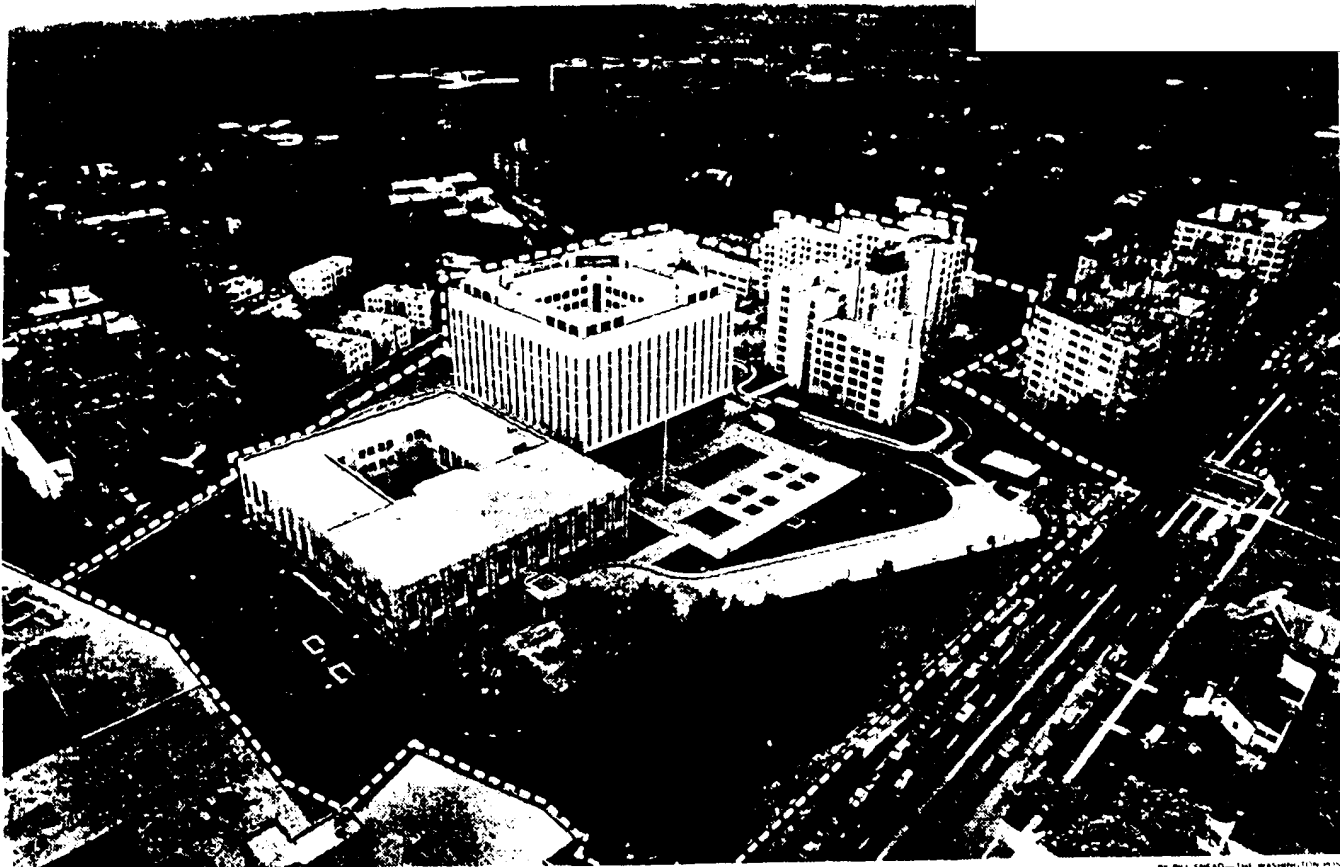


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Wisconsin Avenue traffic flows at lower right past the entry to the almost completed Soviet Embassy complex, which will include an eight-story chancery, apartments and school.

# Soviets Take the High Ground

*New Embassy on Mount Alto Is a Prime Watching—and Listening—Post*

By Kenneth Bredemeier  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The deal was cut in 1969, but now as the new Soviet Embassy nears completion on one of the highest vantage points in the nation's capital, some American officials believe that giving the site to the Russians was a major blunder.

With a sweeping view of the White House, the State Department and much of the Washington area, Soviet officials will have a prime location for electronic surveillance of government, personal and commercial conversations that are transmitted by microwave. The embassy site, on Mount Alto between Wisconsin Avenue and Tunlaw Road NW, is only a short distance downhill from the panoramic views available at the Washington Cathedral.

"We just got snookered; it's inexplicable," said Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), a longtime critic of U.S. efforts to combat Soviet eavesdropping on American telephone and radio communications.

James E. Nolan Jr., director of the State Department's Office of Foreign Missions and former counterintelligence chief for

the FBI, said, "I'm sure if we knew everything then that we do now we wouldn't have made the same selection. We wouldn't have picked nearly the highest site in the city."

"Obviously anything which is broadcast, anything that's up in the air, can be intercepted by receivers," Nolan said.

After six years of negotiation, the Soviets and the Americans agreed in 1969 during the Nixon administration to build new embassies here and in Moscow. At the time, however, officials say the importance of microwave communications and their interception was not widely realized.

The 10-acre Mount Alto site, once used for a Veterans Administration hospital, was surplus federal property 16 years ago and deemed a suitable location for the Soviets to build their \$70 million compound. It will include an eight-story white marble chancery, a four-story consulate and ambassador's residence, a reception hall, a 165-unit apartment building, a school for diplomats' children, a gymnasium and a 400-seat auditorium, much of which has been in use for several years.

"We did not capture the site," said Soviet Embassy spokesman Boris Malakhov. "We were given it."

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